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Testimony in support of: HB 1097 *Creating a Special Services Endorsement for School Nurses*

Thank you to the Chairs of Education, Representative Currey and Senator McCrory, and Committee Members for the opportunity to testify in favor of creating a Special Services Endorsement for school nurses.

School nursing is a highly evolved specialty that goes beyond the typical stomachache, ice pack and band-aid. This is far from a nurse's day-to-day reality and my testimony will support the need for creation of a Special Services Endorsement to prepare nurses for the demands of health care in school in 2023 and going forward. I am highly in favor of HB 1097 as it is time for a change.

41 years have passed with no change to CGS 10- 212-2 1982 regulations for school nurses. <https://statepolicies.nasbe.org/health/categories/health-services/school-nurse-qualifications/connecticut>. Fast forward to 2023. School health has changed drastically from the days when special needs children were in separate schools. Inclusion of all students altered the school environment. Medical advances save babies who would not have survived in the past. Medical advances allow children to survive, thrive and go to school. Look at all the changes that have happened from 2019-2023.

Progress in medications and technology for asthma, diabetes, cardiac conditions, seizure disorders and more require nursing intervention to keep children "in school, in class and ready to learn." Diabetic treatments, such as sliding scales, carbohydrate counts, and pumps keep changing. The school nurse must keep up with changes and the unique protocol for each child. Portable EKG's and telehealth monitor cardiac conditions. Pacemakers and implantable defibrillators may be used. Vagus Nerve Stimulation or Responsive Neurostimulation are implantable devices designed to prevent or lessen seizures.

Addressing the health care of every child with a health condition, not limited to the examples above, is only a part of what the school nurse must know and be able to do. The bigger challenge for the school nurse is how to integrate health care in a school setting. How to provide care with the least impact on class time, how to serve on the Special Education team by including health care needs in the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), a plan that will vary from child to child with the same diagnosis. In the 1990's schools became aware of a different plan for students who did not have learning needs but had physical or emotional needs requiring accommodations. 504 plans added a new layer for school nurses related to the obligation to accommodate children in school.

School nurses not only plan for the school day; add before and after school programs, field trips, international trips, sports... The scope of responsibility to include all children in school related activities demands that school nurses maintain an awareness of individual needs and laws to include everyone. Our day does not start at 7a and go to 3p any longer. There are emails and phone calls, meetings with parents, school staff and providers. School nurses teach all day, every day. In my opinion, we are the glue that holds the school community together.

Which brings us to support for a Special Services Endorsement. For all school nurses to obtain equality with the rest of school professional staff, the process is to create a special services endorsement. That endorsement is the only one recognized by SDE. It is the only one that recognizes nurses as certified staff

just like social workers and other support staff. We are highly educated, most with Bachelor's degrees and beyond and we require a CT Nursing License.

There are so many differences in how nurses are prepared to be school nurses ranging from very little to a variety of orientation methods. The goal of a Special Services Endorsement is to create a standardized program that prepares nurses to work in school; something that does not exist now. The goal is to create a standard of preparation for all school nurses, regardless of the employer, so that nurses are both clinically able to work in schools as well as knowledgeable regarding school law and regulations.

Would a teacher be hired to work without formal training to teach? As the teachers on this Committee know, teachers are trained to teach before they start working. No school professionals are allowed to work in school without proper education and a specified experience. Why is the same standard not applied to school nurses? For me personally my orientation was "Welcome to your school. Call if you have any questions." I did not know what I did not know. There are still questions that present themselves that I do not have the answer too. No longer does the phrase "fake it till you make it" seem appropriate for the role of a school nurse.

What Will Special Services Endorsement Do For School Nurses?


Special Services Endorsement will:

1. Create a standard of preparation for the role of school nurse. Currently there is no program, pre-service, internship or comprehensive orientation for nurses entering schools. Nurses have no experience or knowledge related to providing health services in a school environment. There is no relationship with educational law, special education or 504.
2. Will offer professional equity to school nurses by placing them in the same category as all other school staff (Social workers, Speech and language, psychologists, guidance...). Nurses are classified "Non-Certified" staff, not "Certified" staff resulting in barriers to professional development and as recognized interdisciplinary team members.
3. Will clarify criteria for hiring by defining requirements for school nurses.
4. Will result in an outcome of a well-prepared, highly qualified professional work force capable of a high level of service to students, staff, administration, and districts. Highly qualified school nurses can more successfully function within the laws and regulations specific to educational settings. Practicing in an educational setting versus a medical environment requires a unique scope where education is the primary focus. With one foot in health and one foot in education, school nurses are unique practitioners. It is well beyond time to change regulations written in 1982 (41 years ago) to meet the increasingly complex needs of a diverse student population in an ever-changing environment.

It is, and has been, the recommendation of the School Nurse Advisory Council (SNAC) to see the 1982 regulations change. See 2023 recommendations from SNAC on pages 4-6.

Recommendations include:

- **Revise regulations written in 1982 to include entry level requirement for school nurses as a Bachelor of Science in Nursing or a related field.**
- **Nurses entering without a Bachelor degree will have 5 years to gain the degree.**
- **Nurses currently serving as school nurses will be grandfathered.**
- **Create a Special Services Endorsement for school nurses.**

| Special Services Endorsement Classified as certified staff | No Special Services Endorsement Classified as non-certified staff |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech and Language Pathologist (#061) • School Counselor (#068) • School Psychologist (#070) • School Social Worker (#071) • School Nurse-Teacher (#072) (primarily for teaching CNA classes) • School Dental Hygienist-Teacher (#073) |  School Nurses |
| Downloaded from What are special services endorsements (ct.gov) | |

It is time to move school nurses from Column B to Column A. School social workers, speech and language pathologists, psychologists, and counselors are licensed by the Department of Public Health as well as certified by the State Department of Education. It is time for school nurses to be afforded the same opportunity for a Special Services Endorsement and certification by the State Department of Education as their professional colleagues (see table above).

We urge you to support HB 1097 for the benefit of school nurses, school districts, and most importantly, Connecticut's children.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,
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Derby Public Schools Nursing Supervisor